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U.S. House backs pastor

Representatives call unanimously for Iran to release Nadarkhani

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — The U.S. House of Representatives has passed a resolution calling for the immediate release of Yousef Nadarkhani, the Iranian pastor who could be executed any day in his Muslim-dominated homeland for refusing to renounce his Christian faith.

The resolution passed by an official vote of 417-1, although the one representative who voted "no," Lois Capps of California, said she did so by mistake and corrected her vote minutes later. She said in a floor speech she supports Nadarkhani.

Nadarkhani, whose first name also has been spelled Youcef, was sentenced to death in 2010 for converting from Islam to Christianity in a case that began in 2009. His plight has gained international attention. Several sources close to Nadarkhani say the death order already may have been issued.

The resolution "condemns the Government of Iran for its state-sponsored persecution of religious minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran and its continued violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and calls for the Government of Iran to exonerate and immediately release Youcef Nadarkhani and all other individuals held or charged on account of their religion."

Nadarkhani, who leads a 400-person house church movement, has refused in court numerous times to recant his Christian faith and pledge obedience to Islam, according to the British-based Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), which monitors religious freedom.

The House resolution further states that "numerous Government of Iran officials have attempted to coerce Youcef Nadarkhani to recant his Christian faith and accept Islam in exchange for his freedom."

Advocates familiar with Nadarkhani's case said conditions of his imprisonment have varied from solitary confinement



Nadarkhani

to being allowed visits from family members and his attorney. Jason DeMars, president of Present Truth Ministries, a group that works with Christians in Iran, said officials have repeatedly used pressure tactics to force Nadarkhani to become a Muslim, including threats to seize his children and arresting his wife on apostasy charges.

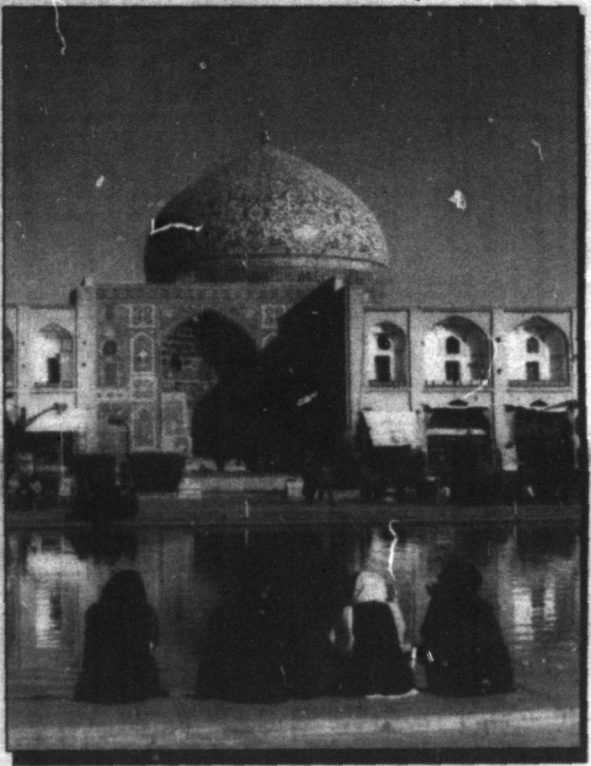
During June 2010, officials found his wife, Fatemah Pasindedih, guilty of the charges, but her conviction was stricken on appeal and she was released in October.

The House resolution states that a United Nations official reported Iran secretly executed 146 people in 2011 and more than 300 people in 2010. The last person to be executed for "apostasy" in Iran was Hossein Soodmand, who was hanged on Dec. 3, 1990.

Soodmand's case has parallels with Nadarkhani's. Soodmand also was a pastor, and he also became a Christian as a teenager. Soodmand however, believed in the Islamic religion as a child. Nadarkhani argues that he has never been a Muslim.

The White House and State Department also have released official statements urging Iran to free Nadarkhani. Following are excerpts from the text of the House resolution:

"Condemning the Government of Iran for its



RELIGIOUS STATE — While the U.S. House of Representatives has called for the release of Iranian pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, the Iranian government's last word was that unless he renounce his Christian faith, Nadarkhani will be executed. In the above photo, pilgrims sit opposite the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in the Islamic Republic of Iran. (Shutterstock)

continued persecution, imprisonment, and sentencing of Youcef Nadarkhani on the charge of apostasy.

"Whereas articles 23 through 27 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran provide for freedom of expression, assembly, and association, as well as the freedom to practice one's religion; ...

"Whereas in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of incidents of Iranian authorities raiding religious services, detaining worshippers and religious leaders, and harassing and threatening minority religious members; ...

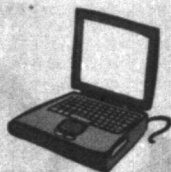
"Now, therefore, be it

"Resolved, That the House of Representatives —

"(1) condemns the Government of Iran for its state-sponsored persecution of religious minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran ... and calls for the Government of Iran to exonerate and immediately release Youcef Nadarkhani and all other individuals held or charged on account of their religion;

"(2) recognizes that freedom of religious belief and practice is a universal human right and a fundamental freedom of every individual, ...

"(3) recognizes that governments have a responsibility to protect the fundamental rights of their citizens and to pursue justice for all."



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Awash in alcohol

Timothy Odies has a long-standing alcohol problem. Just about everyone who has had contact with him over the years knows that. A few days before Thanksgiving in 2009, retired Jackson teacher Billie Jefferson died when Odies allegedly ran a red light and collided with her at the intersection of Northside Drive and Bailey Avenue in Jackson. According to news reports at the time, Odies fled the scene of the accident.

On February 23 of this year, Hinds County Circuit Judge Winston Kidd sentenced Odies to 15 years in prison with five years suspended for Aggravated Driving Under the Influence. Kidd also sentenced him to five years for leaving the scene of an accident, but allowed that sentence to run concurrently, meaning at the same time as the Aggravated DUI sentence.

Ten years. Under Mississippi law and the judge's discretion, that is all Billie Jefferson's life was worth. That, and the few pennies in taxes Odies paid when he purchased the alcohol.

There's more. Because of a communication breakdown among local government agencies, Odies was allowed to bond out of jail after the collision with Jefferson and went on to collect four more DUI charges before his trial date. There could have been four more collisions and an untold number of additional deaths, but this is just one more indication of the lack of seriousness and focus among Mississippians when it comes to alcohol use and abuse.

"He has no criminal history other than alcohol-related offenses," his attorney, Aafraam Sellers, told The Clarion Ledger

newspaper in Jackson. "Alcohol has a hold on him... This was a sad case all around, but what was sad is that a woman lost her life."

By the way, Billie Jefferson was Timothy Odies' sixth-grade teacher.

Harry Bostick, a retired Internal Revenue Service agent, was given a full pardon by outgoing Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour for a March 2009 felony drunk driving conviction after he was arrested for DUI three times in less than a year.

Bostick learned of his DUI pardon while sitting in jail in Oxford waiting to be charged with drunk driving in the death of 18-year old Charity Smith of Okolona.

"She should still be here with me. She should still be here with me. This should not have happened," Charity's mother, Linda Smith, told CNN in a tearful interview that was truly difficult to watch.

No one should be surprised that such outrages could occur in Mississippi. Virtually every family in the state has been traumatized in some way by the abuse of alcohol, yet Mississippi legislators apparently believe there aren't already enough alcohol tragedies to go around.

Earlier this week the Mississippi Senate approved a bill that would increase the

amount of alcohol allowed in so-called craft beers that are currently not available in the state, due to their high alcohol content. Under the measure passed by the Senate, alcoholic beverages would be permitted to have a much higher alcohol volume to accommodate these fancy brews.

The bill also contains sweetheart provisions for the state's few breweries and for individuals who wish to home brew their own beer.

Mississippi is awash in alcohol, but a majority of the state's senators apparently believe there isn't already enough alcohol to go around. Perhaps they believe the pennies paid in taxes on these products are somehow worth the life of someone like Billie Jefferson. Perhaps they believe it's worth the personal destruction of people like Timothy Odies and Harry

Bostick.

It's not. We don't need more alcohol. We don't need more alcohol tragedies. Call your senators and representatives today and let them know how you feel about their plan to flood Mississippi with more alcohol. They can be reached at the legislative switchboard at (601) 359-3770. Additional contact information, including e-mail addresses, can be obtained by visiting <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/>.



GUEST OPINION:



A secret grief

By Terri Stovall
Ft. Worth, Texas

anchored in the roles we fill, but in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

My identity as a woman is not whether or not I bear or rear children, but whether I am faithfully following God and living my life as He has directed it. My primary desire cannot be for children but my primary desire must be for God and to allow Him to fill in the blanks.

Because of God's grace I am saved (Ephesians 2:8), a slave of righteousness (Romans 6:18), a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), chosen of God, holy and dearly loved (Colossians 3:12) and a part of the Bride of Christ making myself ready (Revelations 19:7).

Not having children of her own does not discount a woman from mothering. Rather, it is just the opposite. There are many girls and young women in this world who need spiritual moth-

ering and long to have an older woman who loves, teaches, nurtures, corrects, and protects them. God's grace propels us to nurture, mother and invest in the lives of young women and, often, it is when we answer this command that we run headlong into God's grace and our grief is replaced by purpose.

The world will judge and place motive on the life circumstances and decisions of others. When it comes to childlessness, this seems to be even truer in the Body of Christ. Many women will attest to the feeling that they have been judged as a "lesser woman," questioned as to "what is wrong with you?" or indicted because they have been unsuccessful in fertility or adoption, often leading to guilt and shame.

God's grace always redeems. He forgives past sins. He restores completely.

If you are living as God has asked you to live and He has chosen not to crown your marriage with children, what is there to feel guilty about? Galatians 1:10 reminded me that if I "were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."

If you are a woman who is experiencing the grief of infertility, God has made a way for you to meet His grace. You need simply to pour your heart out to Him, just as Hannah did (Psalms 62:8). I won't tell you He will take your sadness away, but He can transform it into hope, redemption, peace and a grace that will eclipse your every grief.

If you are serving in a church, how many of these women are sitting in your pews? How are you meeting them in their grief? Are you intentionally leading them to Christ?

I am grateful someone once led me to the foot of the cross, the place where I laid my infertility down and my grief met His grace.

Stovall is dean of women's programs at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth. This column first appeared at BiblicalWoman.org, and appears here courtesy of Baptist Press. Edited for length.

Church planters look to impact south Florida

MIAMI (BP) — At 6 feet, 6 inches and 255 pounds, 36-year-old Danny Egipciaco looks more like a linebacker for the Miami Dolphins than a North American Mission Board (NAMB) national missionary and church planter in South Florida.

Playing football, however, would not be nearly as important as what God has called Egipciaco to do, which is to use his considerable passion and stamina in working long hours to plant new churches and bring fellow South Floridians to Christ.

The challenge of spreading the Gospel in the Miami metro area is immense because, by all accounts, local lostness is vast. With about 95% of metro Miami's eight million people unchurched, it is one of the most unchurched populaces in the United States, Egipciaco says.

Egipciaco lives in nearby Hialeah with his wife Karina and their three children, Daniel Jr., Elyse, and Brianna. A fourth child is on the way. Karina holds a master's degree in marriage and family counseling.

The Egipcios are among five NAMB missionary couples featured for the 2012 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. The offering provides support for missionaries who serve on behalf of Southern Baptists in North America.

With a goal of \$70 million, this year's offering theme is "Whatever It Takes."

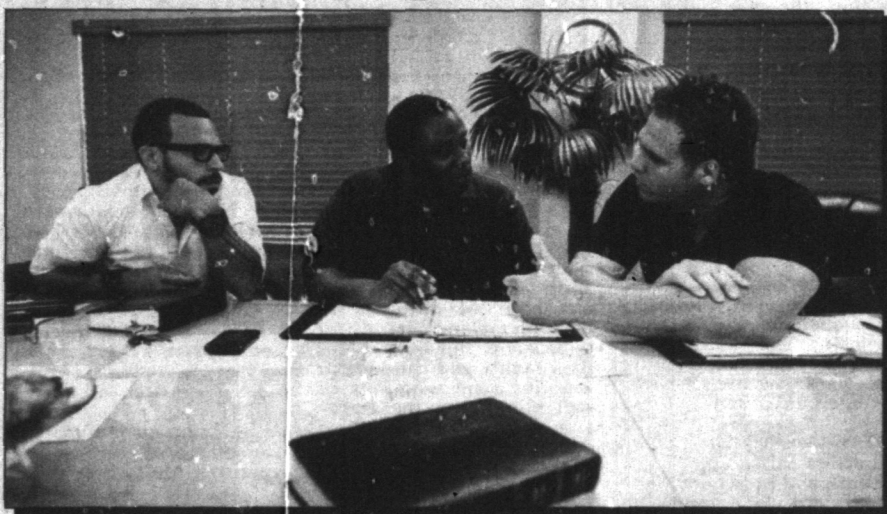
Egipciaco, who moved to Miami at age four, grew up in a Christian home, and attended a Spanish-speaking Hispanic Southern Baptist church. He accepted Christ as a teenager under the influence of his mom, a native Cuban who was led to Christ as a girl by a Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board) missionary. His parents still live in Hialeah.

Egipciaco was serving as a 28-year-old youth pastor in a "legacy" first-generation Spanish-speaking Southern Baptist church when he realized it just wasn't working. Ministering in Spanish was not the most effective way to reach Miami youth.

"I had to change everything," Egipciaco recalls. "We were doing church in Spanish but, instead, we needed to connect with the growing second-generation Hispanics in South Florida who spoke English. Second-gen Hispanics is one of the fastest-growing people groups in South Florida and the U.S."

Longtime church planting missionary Al Fernandez, now director of the Florida Baptist Convention's Urban Impact Ministries and a 2009 Week of Prayer missionary himself, offered advice and counsel to Egipciaco, eventually becoming his mentor and supervisor.

"Al had already planted a second-generation English-speaking Hispanic church, and he shared



PLANTING STRATEGY — Danny Egipciaco (right), North American Mission Board church planting and 2012 Week of Prayer missionary in Miami, talks strategy with fellow church planters David J. Rios (left) and Willie Williams. (BP photo)

his wisdom, ideas and experience with me," Egipciaco recounts. "Thirty days later, I left the youth ministry, started preaching in a local hotel and became a church planter." That was 2005.

Today, Egipciaco and Fernandez mentor 30-plus church planters in the Miami area, many of whom are bivocational pastors or even laymen.

Egipciaco and Fernandez face many challenges as they attempt to plant a yearly average of about 34 new churches in South Florida. Miamians who use Spanish as their first language make up 67% of the population. A total of some 180 languages are spoken in South Florida public schools.

"Many people in Miami, especially the second-generation Hispanics, just don't think about religion, including Christianity," Fernandez says. "It's not on their radar screens. Miami is a very materialistic place, a bling-bling kind of place. People are always chasing the almighty dollar. It's also a fast-paced, time-consuming environment. Sunday is for everything else but church: the beach, boating, the parks, the Dolphins, the Heat, and the Marlins."

"Conversely, some of the first-generation Hispanics who come here exist in survival mode, working two or three jobs just to survive," Fernandez points out, referring to the fact that they don't have time to attend church.

Fernandez and Egipciaco also confront spiritual warfare, with Fernandez noting, "Miami has a lot of Cuban-based 'Santeria' or voodoo."

Fernandez is jointly funded by NAMB and the Florida Baptist Convention, while Egipciaco is funded 100% by NAMB. Until his appointment by the North American Mission Board as a

national missionary in 2009, Egipciaco was the first and only pastor of Relevant Church, which he helped plant in 2006 and was running 120 weekly attendees when he left several months ago.

At Relevant Church, he never took a salary. He was not merely a bivocational pastor, but a "trivocational" pastor, holding down as many as three jobs at a time to support his family — working on the side in real estate, substitute teaching, and selling computers and copiers.

"What unites church planting in South Florida is the English-speaking people," Egipciaco notes. "When we plant an English-speaking church, it draws many Hispanic people groups to join — Cubans, Venezuelans, Nicaraguans, Uruguayans, Columbians, Spaniards, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Guatemalans and so on. The English-speaking churches also draw Haitians who speak Creole, French, African Americans, Anglos and even Russians, so our church plants tend to become very multicultural and diverse."

Egipciaco knows that Florida now has nearly 3,000 Southern Baptist congregations, but its population has grown to more than 18.5 million people, the second-largest state in NAMB's South Region. It needs many more churches.

"Within a one-mile radius of my church, there are 30,000 people," Egipciaco says. "Within a three-mile radius, there are 80,000 people. Within five miles, 240,000 people. We have only three Southern Baptist churches in a three-mile area."

"In West Palm Beach, there are 1 million lost people. We'd need 100 churches that would each hold 10,000 to reach them. Miami is two to three times bigger than West Palm. There are 600 Southern Baptist churches in all of South Florida, but when you think there's eight million people in the Miami area, do the math. That's one church for every 13,000 people."

"We need to penetrate the culture through church planting," he said. "We need more churches, not less."

Looking back

10 years ago

Michael W. Weeks of Tupelo has been unanimously elected president of the Southern Baptist Foundation, William K. "Bill" Hall, vice-chairman of the foundation's board of trustees and chairman of the presidential search committee announced Mar. 7.

20 years ago

By a margin of almost two to one, Pullen Memorial Church, Raleigh, N.C., votes to bless the union of two homosexual men. A resolution passed by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee condemns Pullen for condoning the "gross perversion and unquestioned sin" of homosexuality.

50 years ago

The Mississippi Baptist Seminary is in a campaign to make a million friends and raise a million dollars by 1970, according to William P. Davis, Secretary of Negro Work of the State Convention Board.



MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS

THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

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MARCH 15, 2012

VOL. 136

No. 11



**YOU CAN RESPOND
RIGHT NOW!**

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

It is impossible to tell the story of the church without telling the story of the founder. The founder of Christianity is totally and inseparable from the present day reality of the church. As you examine religions around the world and across our land it is insightful and sometimes even shocking to realize who the founders are and to examine their lives and what started their faith interest. It is a study unto itself. In a world in which the culture has been saturated with so many emphases on beliefs and even non-belief systems which reject God, it makes it imperative that we know the One who founded the church.

We are hopeful that on March 18 in Baptist churches all across Mississippi, many of our great preachers filling our pulpits will be proclaiming messages on the life of Jesus Christ. Almost any religious system goes back to someone who started the thought and faith process for them. Without apology, we have the privilege to proclaim that no one is like Jesus. Regardless of where you look, whether it is the Mormons and their founder, Joseph Smith, or Islam and their founder, Mohammed, or even Judaism with their founder, Abraham, none comes close to standing alongside of Jesus.

While many of them may have been good men with hearts that desired to find God, Jesus came from God, was God in the flesh, and forever is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He is the unchangeable, pre-eminent leader, Lord, Master, and gift from God to us. For centuries God had been preparing the world to meet and know His Savior. While every one of us has sinned and come short of the glory of God, He was determined to wrap His glory in the skin of a person named Jesus and send Him to us as the Savior who would rescue us from the destructiveness of sin. It is not easy for mankind to understand a great God of righteousness, power, and even love. When you look at our lives and realize that they are scarred by sin and warped by failed relationships because of our wrong thinking and doing, where could we ever find help and hope? We tried to straighten ourselves out and even that became frustration and failure because it was impossible.

So God in His great wisdom sent Jesus to be the contact person to God and much more He was the very embodiment of God. In so doing, God allowed us to see

and to understand. Regardless of whether we are a child, who is too young to grapple with right and wrong and the feelings of guilt and failure, a young adult caught in all of the crosshairs of difficulty in decision making not only for themselves but maybe for their family and children, or a senior adult who may be struggling with the frailty and the finality of life and death, we can turn to Him. God sent us Jesus so that when we look at Jesus we could see God. His arms are outstretched and we can come to Him. If you want to know what God looks like, look at Jesus. If you want to know how He thinks, look at the mind of Jesus. If you want to know how He treats people when they have failed and are broken, watch Jesus. If you want to see the power He has to make a difference in a life, you can experience Him and know the difference in this world and the world to come.

While time and space would certainly not allow me to deal with all of the aspects of Jesus' life in this article, let me just briefly point out an array of things that the Bible clearly tells us and people have personally found to be true in God's redemptive, magnificent Savior, Jesus.

- He is the pre-existent Christ. He was before the worlds were ever made and He will be long after they are gone.

- He is the prophetic Christ for God had told over the centuries and hundreds of times words that clearly describe the Savior who would come and give life.

- He is the perfect Christ. He never sinned. He was tempted and tried in the same world in which we live. He lived without sin and became the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

- He is the personal Christ. When at times people feel that God is so far away and is untouchable, austere, and seemingly unknowable Jesus demonstrated that God has come to us. He would stop to pick up a child and care about that precious little person. He would come to others who were overwhelmed by grief and others who were crippled by the dilemmas of this world and He would

gently, lovingly, and personally care for them.

- He is the powerful Christ for there was no sin that He could not overcome, no conflict that He could not resolve, and no sinner that He could not save.

- He is, in fact, the pre-eminent Christ, simply meaning that He stands above all and is able to help all.

In looking at His life, we are not entering into just an academic exercise or an experience of having more cognitive knowledge about Him. For all of those things bring us to the ultimate question in every heart, what will you do with Jesus. Clearly there are those who deplore Him and would prefer that His name never be mentioned, His teachings be eradicated, and His follow-

ers be marginalized to insignificance. Others sometimes in a kind of intellectual way just choose to ignore Him, but that is a difficult thing to do when He is the epitome of the work of God among us. To ignore Him is to set your life on a path of ultimate destruction and alienation from God. For that reason, all across our state teachers and preachers will be presenting the life of Jesus so that we all might explore Him. To look at and understand the life of Jesus is a glorious opportunity to welcome God's Son, the Savior, to be your Lord and Master. While He has no equal in this world or the world to come, what He will do for you when you trust Him is a moment that is unequalled in life. He will forgive your sins, cleanse your heart, and give you a new life forever and ever. May God bless this Sunday as we focus on Telling the Story of Jesus — a life of unprecedented love and unparalleled excellence.

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JGNRB DG IZ YLBD BDG
YHXM HT BXIBD, BDRB
YG ZDHIPM JG R WLUM
HT TLXZBTXILBZ HT
DLZ KXGRBIXGZ.
SRCGZ HUG: GLNDBG-
GU

Clue: T = F

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Hebrews Thirteen: Eight



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

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GOING FORTH — Dwight Fern, an International Mission Board missionary in Manila, hosts multiple sessions monthly to train and encourage pastors serving the urban poor. Fern has been leading the training for more than 10 years, and currently works with 300 local pastors. (BP photo)

Inroads among Manila's poor offer windows to share Gospel

MANILA, PHILIPPINES (BP) — "Come on," a young man calls as he and a group of teenagers trek to a squatter village to teach the Bible. They pass an open field where several children are kicking a partially deflated soccer ball, and he again calls, "Come on."

The children stop and smile when they see who is calling them. Abandoning the ball, they follow, bare feet splashing mud. The group crosses a concrete bridge over a drainage ditch filled with gray water and trash, and the children chatter with their teachers.

Filipino pastor Romy Albinus and IMB worker Dwight Fern follow.

As the group reaches the village, some young mothers carrying infants along with other women drag benches under a tree and settle down on the creaky seats. The young people unfurl their song sheets, Christian lyrics carefully printed on the back of old alcohol advertising posters.

This is one of thousands of squatter communities in metro Manila, filled with people who moved to the city from rural provinces in search of a better life. Instead, they became part of a mass of urban poor, building shelters from whatever they can find.

Housing once meant to be temporary has been standing here more than 20 years. Work intended to be a steppingstone toward better employment has become a career. Hope for a prosperous future has faded; survival has become the daily goal.

Despite the bleak outlook they face, hope has not abandoned the urban poor. "God wants 104 million Filipinos in His Kingdom," Fern says to a group of pastors he's teaching.

Pastors nod thoughtfully as Fern speaks. For the past 10 years, Fern has been training pastors among the urban poor to start small house groups focused on fellowship and Bible study. More than 300 pastors now attend the training sessions he conducts every month.

"Filipinos love to study the Bible," Fern says. "It's the idea of church that scares people away," although many attend mass at local Catholic churches.

Life in the Philippines is steeped in religious traditions. Nuns serve as teachers in most schools so religious training is nothing new to Filipinos, but the idea of offering poor pastors a sense of value is nothing short of revolutionary.

As pastors study with Fern — many from homes in squatter communities — they carry back with them the hope they are finding in Christ. "There is a hope of tomorrow being better," Fern says. "The poor respond to Christ as they look to the promise of heaven... This life is hard, but heaven will be better."

Cultural norms and lack of material possessions and social status often discourage the urban poor from seeking a better life. Simple jobs require a college education, which many cannot afford; they are too busy forging a living. However, as

they latch onto the training their pastors provide, they begin to understand the Gospel and share the hope they receive.

As they begin forming house groups, they develop a new sense of purpose.

Albinus, who has been part of Fern's training for three years, has taken the training to heart and begun to train the young people of his church to lead house groups. "They are the future," he says.

Every week, a half-dozen young people parade into nearby squatter communities. Dividing up, they lead small groups of adults and children in studying the Bible and fellowshiping together.

As other villagers swig cheap alcohol and gamble a few pesos at a card game, they watch their neighbors join the Bible study and listen with mild interest to the discussion. It is a small village, after all. Everyone knows everything that happens there.

Albinus and Fern watch the squatter children's faces, wreathed in smiles, as they sing songs about the love of Jesus. They wear faded, dirty clothes. Their hair is streaked from malnutrition and teeth are black with rot.

"Nobody wants them or cares about them. Thing is, they're just as special as anyone else," Fern muses.

When the study ends, the children follow the teenagers down the narrow, polluted street. "Bye bye," they shout repeatedly, waving until they cannot see the group anymore.

Federal embryo adoption program likely to die in fiscal year 2013

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — The Obama administration's effort to defund the federal government's only program promoting embryo adoption further demonstrates its abortion mindset, say pro-life advocates.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is not seeking funding for the Embryo Adoption Awareness Campaign in the 2013 fiscal year. The Washington Times reported March 4. The program is designed to inform Americans that frozen embryos created by in vitro fertilization (IVF) may be available for adoption by those who are infertile.

Embryo adoption allows couples, most of them infertile, to adopt embryos left over from IVF treatments. The biological parents must offer consent for their embryos to be used. Without adoption, the estimated 625,000 embryos in frozen storage in this country can face death by being discarded or by being donated for lethal research.

The HHS decision fits with this administration's policies on such issues, pro-lifers said in protest.

"It's indicative of the Obama administration's anti-unborn-citizen attitude that it would remove funding from the embryo adoption program," said Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) in Nashville.

"It's one more example that they are at war with our unborn citizens," Land said.

C. Ben Mitchell, professor of moral philosophy at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., described the Obama administration as "ideologically driven. This decision is additional evidence that it may be the most anti-natal administration in history."

In a document submitted to congressional appropriations committees, HHS said it seeks to halt funding of the campaign because "of the limited interest in the program as evidenced by grants being awarded to a very small pool of applicants, many of whom are repeat recipients." The fate of the program rests with Congress, which can restore its funding in the budget.

Embryo adoption awareness still is worth funding, an advocate told The Times.

Ron Stoddart, executive director of Nightlight Christian Adoptions, pointed to the continued increases in embryos placed in storage, in babies born from embryo adoption, and in embryo adoption programs.



SPECIAL ADOPTION — Julian Keene Bailey (left), and Natalie Faith Bailey pose for a 2009 photo. The twins were born April 4, 2008, via embryo adoption to an East Tennessee couple. The Obama administration had decided not to continue funding for a federal government program that promoted embryo adoptions. (BP photo)

JUST FOR THE RECORD



2. Waddell licensing



3. Spring Hill Church, Waterford



8. Duke and Carlisle



10. Hope Church, Neshoba Association

1. Journey Church, Olive Branch, licensed Michael Cooper to the ministry on his birthday, Jan. 29

2. Grace Church, Philadelphia, recently licensed Bud Waddell into the gospel ministry. Shown are pastor Chester Carlisle, Waddell, and Shirley Waddell.

3. Spring Hill Church, Waterford, recently held a baby dedication service. Shown are Tim & Ashley Cook with babies Kylee Jean and Trigger Wayne; and Jonathan & Jayme Thweatt with baby Owen Drake. John Parker, pastor.

4. GAs from Enterprise Church, Enterprise, collected Christian fiction books as their Children's Ministry Day project.

5. Clarke County Association gave \$78,136.06 toward their Lottie Moon Christmas Offering goal of \$76,000, the largest gift to this offering in their history.

6. Escatawpa Church, Escatawpa, will host The Hoppers in concert, May 6, at 6 p.m. For ticket information, call (228) 475-2938 or 219-5759.

7. Community Church, Oloh, held their January Bible Study Jan. 15 — 18. Donnie Guy led the Bible study on stewardship. Eight professions of faith. Daniel Jackson, pastor.

8. Grace Church, Philadelphia, ordained Michael Duke to the gospel ministry. He is currently serving the church as youth minister. Shown are Duke, left, and pastor Chester Carlisle.

9. Meadowview Church, Starkville, will be presenting Lamb of God Mar. 30, 7 p.m., and Apr. 1, 10:15 a.m.

10. The Children in Action of Hope Church, Neshoba Association, took part in Children's Ministry Day. The ladies of the church baked cookies, and the children and volunteers delivered the cookies to the local 911 communications, sheriff's office, city police, the hospital ER, and fire department.



11. Cochran recognition



12. Williams



13. Lebanon Association GAs

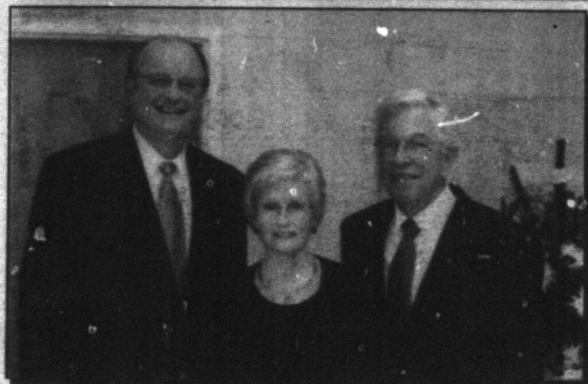
ments. Shown are some of the participants.

11. Pleasant Grove Church, Brookhaven, recognized pastor Kent Cochran and his wife Millie for 20 years of service. Shown is Bruce Clanton, left, making the presentation to the Cochrans. Worship, with Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, speaker, was followed by a catered luncheon.

12. Steele Church, Forest, recently presented a plaque to pastor Reggie Williams (shown) for 20 years of service in the ministry.

13. The GAs from Lebanon Association met at Pineview Church, Hattiesburg, Mar. 3 to make 239 salvation dolls for the Mississippi Baptist Medical and Dental Mission trip to Honduras in June. Shown are the participants.

JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. Buckles and the Hills

1. First Church, Vicksburg, held a rededication service of its Family Life Center Complex Mar. 4. This service marked the end of three phases of a nearly \$3 million renovation of the entire facility over the last ten years. Shown is pastor Matt Buckles with Tom and Jeanell Hill. Hill has been project manager for all three phases of renovation. The church gave the Hills a trip to the Holy Land in appreciation.



5. Lilly

2. Central Church, McNeill, recognized Bill Gordon, left, and Mike Harris as deacons emeritus Mar. 4. The church gave them a luncheon along with the deacons and church ministerial staff.



2. Gordon and Harris

3. The GAs of First Church, Flora, "Waitressed for Missions" Feb. 1 during the church's Wednesday night supper. All the tips received went toward a mission project of purchasing Walmart and Target gift cards for a missionary to distribute to people as he visited them. The girls raised \$450 to date. Shown are the participants.



6. O'Tuckolofa Church, Water Valley

4. Unity Church, Attala Association, welcomes deacons to service. Shown are J.D. Oakes, Joy Oakes, Pastor Danny Townsend, Susanne Townsend, Jerry Armstrong, and Carolyn Armstrong.



3. First Church, Flora

5. First Church, Belzoni, honored Nellie Jo Lilly (shown) with an appreciation reception Feb. 12. Lilly has served the church for over 40 years in the music department. She is the church organist and has served as music director since 1968.



7. Baker ordination

6. The 4th — 6th grade class of O'Tuckolofa Church, Water Valley, sponsored a post office for members to "mail" Christmas cards to each other for 25 cents each. The proceeds went toward the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. The church offering goal was \$880, and \$908.50 was received. \$281.50 was collected from the post office. Shown are Sarah Beth Dickerson, Carlye Washington, Brooke Savage, Sidney Kimzey, and Nate Griffin.



8. Tangipahoa Church, Summit

7. Magee's Creek Church, Jayess, ordained Ronnie Baker as deacon Feb. 12. Shown are James Sartin, Pat Baker, Baker, and Archie Herrin.

8. Tangipahoa Church, Summit, held its annual boy's race-off Feb. 18. Shown are Walker Wroten,

Benjamin Wilkinson, leader Doyle Wilson, and Colton Nunnery, winner, Sparkman award.



4. Unity Church, Attala Association

COLLEGE NEWS

1. William Carey University's Amanda C. Monk, mathematics major from Perkinson, and Charlotte McShea, professor of mathematics and education, pose with (back) Tommy King, president of WCU, after King congratulates the student and professor for being chosen as honorees of the 2012 Higher Education Appreciation Day — Working for Academic Excellence (HEADWAE) program. HEADWAE was established by the Mississippi Legislature to recognize outstanding students and faculty in Mississippi's colleges and universities. The recognition was held on Feb. 28.



1. Monk, McShea, and King

West Marion Elementary of Columbia, Runnelstown Elementary of Perry County, Purvis Elementary of Purvis, Tylertown Elementary of Tylertown, and Prentiss Elementary of Prentiss. The YAC event gives students the

opportunity to meet regional authors and illustrators, participate in a book fair, attend workshops on writing and illustrating, meet WCU student teachers and share their books with other students. They also tour the campus and have

2. William Carey University hosted the seventh annual Young Authors Celebration Mar. 2. This year, nearly 600 students from eight schools participated in YAC. Participants included Lillie Burney Elementary of Hattiesburg, Rowan Elementary of Hattiesburg, New Hope Christian Academy of Jackson,



2. Young Authors Celebration

lunch. A grant from Target assisted in making the event possible. Barry Morris, dean of the School of Education, and (right) June Hornsby, professor of education, pose with the Peter Cottontail character.

JUST FOR THE RECORD

1. First Church, Pass Christian, ordained three new deacons November, 2011. Shown are Harry Stegenga, Gregory Carter, Harold Lee, Jr., and pastor William L. Smith.



1. First Church, Pass Christian

2. The Golden Friends of Cedar Grove Church, Columbia, enjoyed a Valentine Brunch Feb. 11. Tim Morrison, pastor and chalk artist, was special guest. Shown are the participants.



2. Cedar Grove Church, Columbia

3. Crossgates Church, Brandon, is hosting a senior adult rally Mar. 27, 8:30 — 11:30 a.m. Judy Davis, Trish McNulty, Scott Ross, Vesta Renfroe, Glenn Shows, and Jim Futral, worship leaders and speakers.

4. C.M. "Son" Jordan, a member of Calvary Church, Greenwood, was awarded the God and Country Award for his Marine combat service by the Greenwood Division of the American Legion.

5. Academy Church, Blue Mountain, will host Karen Peck and New River and The Servants Quartet in concert Mar. 23, 7 p.m. A love offering will be received.

6. Park Haven Church, Laurel, is hosting their 7th annual drive through crucifixion Mar. 30 — 31, 7 — 9 p.m.



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OBITUARIES

1. **Raymond Lewis Hathcock, Jr.**, was born Sept. 19, 1944 in Lucedale, the son of the late Raymond and the late Erma (Shows) Hathcock. His first wife and mother of his children, Pat Hathcock, preceded him in death Aug. 26, 1991. He married Sara Welford in January, 1992. Hathcock worked for the U.S. Postal Service for 26 years and retired as postmaster. He became an ordained minister in 1976 serving churches in George and Green County. He was the current pastor of First Church, Bennedale.
2. **James Foster (Jim) Yates**, 85, died Mar. 5 at King's Daughters Hospital, Yazoo City. A resident since 1961, he was pastor of First Church, Yazoo City, from 1961 until his retirement in 1991. He was named pastor emeritus in 1992. He was born Dec. 5, 1926, in Greenville, Ky. He graduated from Calhoun High School, Calhoun, Ky., and attended Campbellsville Jr. College, Centre College, Danville, Ky., and Union University, Jackson, Tenn. He was also a graduate of Southern Seminary, where he attended the School of Church Music prior to earning his Master of Divinity degree. He married Joy Wirotzious, Memphis, Tenn., in 1955. He was preceded in death by his parents, John Cody Yates, Sr., and Nanny Ethridge Pendley Yates, Utica, Ky., his brothers, Robert Yates, Marion Yates, J.C. Yates, Jr., and a sister, Vernia Bradley. He is survived by one sister, Evelyn (Gibson) DeLacey, Mt. Juliet, Tenn.; his wife of 56 years, Joy Yates; a daughter, Carol Joy (Tommy) Sparkman, Clinton; sons, John (Patty) Yates of Enterprise, Ala.; James Foster (Jim) Yates, Jr., and his wife Paula, Starkville; and Jeff (Suzy) Yates, Universal City, Tex. He is also survived by four grandsons. Visitation and funeral was Mar. 7 at First Church, Yazoo City, with burial in the Glenwood Cemetery.

California radio preacher swears off predictions of Second Coming

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP and local reports) — Harold Camping, the California radio preacher who wrongly predicted that Jesus would return May 21 of last year, has released a remorseful statement calling his prediction "sinful" and saying his critics were right in stating that no one knows the date of Christ's second coming.

The statement by Camping and the "staff of Family Radio" was posted at FamilyRadio.com.

Beginning in 2010, Camping and his supporters bought billboards and radio spots around the world warning that Christ would return on May 21, 2011. Many of those ads even said the "Bible guarantees it," even though the New Testament teaches in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 that "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven."

Camping previously issued several other predictions about the return of Jesus that turned out to be failures.

"We tremble before God as we humbly ask Him for forgiveness for making that sinful statement," the statement reads. "We are so thankful that God is so loving that He will forgive even this sin."

In the weeks leading up to May 21, preachers and Bible scholars from a wide range of denominations including Southern Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian spoke out against Camping's prediction, fearful not only that he was leading Christians astray but that he was harming the name of Christ before a watching world by making a false prediction.

"We now realize that those people who were calling our attention to the Bible's statement that 'of that day and hour knoweth no man' (Matthew 24:36 & Mark 13:32) were right in their understand-

ing of those verses and Family Radio was wrong," the Camping statement says. "Whether God will ever give us any indication of the date of His return is hidden in God's divine plan."

Many of Camping's followers continue to search for the date of Christ's return, a practice that Camping says he is abandoning. "We must also openly acknowledge that we have no new evidence pointing to another date for the end of the world," the letter said.

"Though many dates are circulating, Family Radio has no interest in even considering another date. God has humbled us through the events of May 21, to continue to even more fervently search the Scriptures (the Bible), not to find dates, but to be more faithful in our understanding."

"We have learned the very painful lesson that all of creation is in God's hands and He will end time in His time, not ours! We humbly recognize that God may not tell His people the date when Christ will return, any more than He tells anyone the date they will die physically."

After May 21 passed without Christ's return, many Bible scholars said Camping had done much harm. Denny Burk, associate professor of New Testament at Boyce College, a part of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., said last year he sensed a mocking tone when watching MSNBC's "Morning Joe" crew talking May 20 about Camping's prediction.

"This is the real tragedy of a false teacher like Camping," Burk wrote. "He gives the scoffers a reason for feeling vindicated in their scoffing. He gives aid and comfort to the judgment-suppressing human heart and thereby consigns them to their own God-ignoring delusions."

REVIVALS AND HOMECOMINGS

1. **Pocahontas Church, Jackson:** Revival, Mar. 18 — 21; Sun., 10:30 a.m.;

Mon. — Wed., 7 p.m.; Mickey Dalrymple, speaker; Edd Braisher, music.

Community revival, Mar. 23 — 25; Fri. — Sat., 7 p.m.; Sun., 11 a.m.; Mason Joy, speaker; Shelia Burns & LCYC, music.

2. **Beulah Church, Lexington:** Revival, Mar. 18 — 21; 7 p.m. nightly; Daniel Hall, speaker; O. Lyn Nations, pastor.

3. **Rocky Point Church, Carthage:** Awaken Our

4. **Linwood Church, Neshoba County:** Revival, Mar. 25 — 28; Sun., 6 p.m.; Mon. — Wed., 7 p.m.; David Richardson, speaker; Revival Team, music; Mike Skinner, pastor.

5. **Southside Church, Vicksburg:** Revival, Mar. 25 — 30; Sun., 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon. — Fri., 7 p.m.; Don Savell, speaker; David Warren Family, music, Wednesday night.

6. **Richburg Church, Hattiesburg:** Marvelous Mondays with the Master Revival, 7 p.m.; Apr. 2, Easter celebration musical; Apr. 9, Michael Gynn; Apr. 16, Buddy Sheriff; Apr. 23, Willie Welch; Apr. 30, Stephen Smith; May 7, Dean Register; May 14, Fred Luter; Landon Roney, music each Monday.

7. **Clifton Church, Forest:** Revival, Mar. 19 — 21; Sun., 10:45 a.m. and 7 p.m. nightly; David Hays, speaker; Cliff Horton, music; Andy Boles, pastor.

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SBC seeks input from Hispanics

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP) — The effectiveness of cell groups in reaching Hispanics, the need for quality discipleship materials in Spanish, and family pressures experienced by Hispanic believers were among the topics discussed at the first meeting of the Hispanic Advisory Council on the campus of Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth.

Facilitated by co-chairman Bob Sena of Atlanta, members discussed with Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee President Frank S. Page ways in which God is moving among the Hispanic communities they represent — Mexican, Cuban, European, South American, Central American, Caribbean, first generation immigrants and native-born Americans.

The council was appointed by Page following the September 2011 Executive Committee meeting.

Among the "best practices" for Hispanic ministry, several council members representing various regions of the country — Jonathan Santiago from upstate New York, Frank Moreno from Florida, and Fernán Whittaker from California, as well as Salomón Orellana from New York City and Jorge Meléndez from Chicago — pointed to the effectiveness of cell groups in evangelism and discipleship.

In addition to the cost efficiencies of meeting in homes, Luis López of Tennessee credited the natural hospitality that is part of the Hispanic culture as a major factor for Hispanic church growth through cell groups.

The council also discussed the greatest community needs Hispanics face. Members agreed that the foremost need is for quality educational opportunities, including access to inexpensive ministerial training.

Yolanda Calderón of California pointed to high rates of

domestic violence, often the result of unemployment or underemployment, while Orellana added that rehabilitation services are a great need in the urban setting where he lives and works.

Jason Carlisle of Virginia noted the high incidence in human trafficking and highlighted fears many Hispanics have over current U.S. immigration policies. Elías Bracamonte of Kansas noted that though many immigrants are in the United States legally, the presence of family members who are in the country illegally produces tension, conflict, instability in family life, and even feelings of guilt.

In addressing congregational needs, Gus Suárez of Missouri pointed to the need for quality discipleship materials written in Spanish. Pedro Avilés of Puerto Rico noted that many Hispanics face family pressures and even persecution when they receive Jesus Christ and desire to be baptized as believers.

Roger "Sing" Oldham, Executive Committee vice president of convention communications and relations, gave the council an overview of how churches can embrace a cooperative relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention. He also reviewed the ethnic study committee report adopted by the SBC in June 2011.

At the close of the meeting, each member was asked to gather information from specific groups in the Hispanic Baptist community. The input will be forwarded to Sena and Sánchez, who will then communicate with Page and Kevin Ezell, president of Southern Baptists' North American Mission Board (NAMB), through Oldham and Ken Weathersby, NAMB presidential ambassador for ethnic church relations.



MEETING TOGETHER — Bob Sena (standing), a Hispanic evangelist, conference leader, and retired North American Mission Board church planting consultant, facilitated the inaugural meeting of the Hispanic Advisory Council at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth. The council was appointed last year by Frank Page (far right), president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee in Nashville, to provide input to convention leaders from the growing Hispanic segment of the SBC. (BP photo)

COLLEGE NEWS

1. **Mississippi College's** table tennis team's second place finish Mar. 3 at the South regionals in Atlanta earned the Choctaws a trip to the national championship in Texas next month. MC impressively defeated teams like Florida State and the University of Texas, but fell to perennial powerhouse Texas Wesleyan during Saturday's tournament in Georgia. In mid-April, Mississippi College's squad will head to the national championship in Plano, Texas for the fifth year in a row. Going into the

tournament, Mississippi College's coed team was rated third in North America behind Texas Wesleyan and second-place Lindenwood University of Missouri.

2. The Winters School of Music at William Carey University hosted the District Five High School Choral Music Festival in Smith Auditorium on the Hattiesburg campus on February 28. Seventeen choirs from seven high schools in the region that stretches from Hattiesburg to Meridian participated.

The festival was headed by Mark Malone, professor of music, and Kathy Vail, associate professor of music. All three of the Meridian High School choirs — SATB (soprano, alto, tenor, bass), SSA (soprano I, soprano II, alto) and TTB (tenor I, tenor II, baritone) — earned superior ratings in both concert and sight-reading assessments and received sweepstakes awards for their performance at the festival. They will all progress to the State Choral Festival at Pearl High March 26-28.

Pro-homosexual groups battle Chick-fil-A on college campuses

BOSTON (BP and local reports) — The student senate at Northeastern University in Boston voted last week to end negotiations to bring fast-food chain Chick-fil-A to campus, after students protested over the company's affiliation with several Christian organizations the students say have an "anti-gay" agenda.

The Atlanta-based company, dogged for months by accusations of homophobia, insists it is "not anti-anybody" but instead simply wants to "graciously serve great food and have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A."

Students from at least 10 campuses aren't buying it. Incensed over the company's Christian values, they opposed new franchises and lobbied for the removal of existing restaurants on campuses across the country.

Although the furor has generated a lot of media attention, prompting the company's president to publicly defend its philanthropic affiliations, it's not likely to hurt Chick-fil-A's bottom line. With about 1,540 restaurants in 38 states and annual sales figures topping three billion dollars, the company still has plenty of fans.

At Northeastern, the student body eagerly embraced Chick-fil-A's proposal to become a vendor in the student center, until a small group of students complained about the organizations to which the company contributes through its WinShape Foundation.

Led by Senior Taylor Cotter, a member of the school's student senate who spent almost a year opposing the company's interest in coming to campus, the students circulated a petition and gathered 300 signatures — about 1.5% of the student body.

Despite the relatively small opposition, the school's student government quickly voted to end negotiations with the company.

School administrators supported the decision, saying the company's principles contradicted Northeastern's respect for diversity and support for the gay community: "We are proud of the decision that affirms our university's commitment to be an inclusive, diverse community that is respectful of all," college spokeswoman Renata Nyul said in a prepared statement.

Responding with their own written statement, company representatives said they were disappointed over the school's "hasty" decision: "We are not anti-anybody and Chick-fil-A [has] no agenda, policy or position against anyone as some report; continue to represent."

Company president Dan Cathy insists Chick-fil-A is not a Christian company, just one founded on biblical principles, but thanks in part to the company's affiliation with pro-family groups, its frequent presence at large religious rallies, and the praise music reverberating from speakers in its restaurants, both fans and detractors often refer to it as one of the country's most overtly Christian businesses.

Through the WinShape Foundation, started by company founders Truett and Jeannette Cathy, Chick-fil-A donates to several Christian organizations, including The Marriage & Family Legacy Fund, The Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and the National Christian Foundation.

According to its statement, Chick-fil-A has given the groups \$1,714,199. None of the organizations the company supports has an "anti-gay" agenda, although as Christian groups they do uphold and support heterosexual marriage, Donald A. Perry, the company's vice president of corporate public relations, said in his statement.

"I want to assure you that the historical intent of our Foundation and corporate giving have been toward compassion, principally by serving youth and families," he said. The company gives millions of dollars every year toward education.

Chick-fil-A also has faced opposition at Duke University, Bowling Green University, Florida Gulf Coast University, Gainesville State College, Indiana University South Bend, Mississippi State University, Texas Tech University, the University of North Texas and New York University.

At Mississippi State University (MSU) in Starkville, commentaries both pro and con on Chick-fil-A's presence on campus have been published in the school newspaper, The Reflector. A petition drive against the restaurant at MSU on a liberal national web site that promotes such activity resulted in about 100 signatures.

The Baptist Record could not verify that the signatures were genuine, or whether the signers were associated with MSU. Many of the signers listed out-of-state addresses.

New York University freshman Hillary Dwarkoski, of Santa Monica, Ca., started an online petition asking school officials to close the existing Chick-fil-A location on campus. The petition now includes almost 11,000 signatures.

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

I Celebrate You

Psalm 92:1-15

By Betty Davis

"Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday dear (your name), Happy Birthday to you!" No matter how old you are, if a group of people, or even one person sings that song and it's your birthday, it's personal, and you automatically smile. It's a celebration when a time is observed in a special way, and in recognition of a person, several people, or an occasion. Some examples could be: anniversaries, achievements, or award recognitions. Holidays are reasons to be happy and make you want to choose a time to get together and rejoice with other people. The four weeks before Christmas, called Advent, have always been some of those celebration times in our home. When our children (Lori, Janet, and Chuck) were at home, we all

looked forward to each Sunday night as we gathered and read Bible verses, sang a Christmas carol and thanked God for Baby Jesus. Of course we had snacks and egg nog! Now the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren celebrate Advent in their own homes, and Charles and I still celebrate the birth of Christ in our home...along with those special snacks.

Shouldn't each church worship service be a celebration to honor Jesus? Just going through the motions as usual doesn't make a celebration happen. Our attitudes and smiles are a good beginning. If each believer sings the songs with gratitude for what Jesus Christ means to them, it could become a celebration every week! When our great grandson, Maddox, was a year old he joined his mother as she



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sang "How great is our God!" He stretched his neck tall and sang, "How GRAPE is our God!" He was learning to praise and celebrate God with singing. (Psalm 86:12)

Celebrate God in Worship Psalm 92:1-4

"Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands." (Psalm 66:1 KJV) The psalmist had the right idea for ways to praise God. The words were spoken directly and complimentary to God with adoration. "My mouth...praise Thee with joyful lips." (Psalm 63:5 NIV) The psalmist used a lyre, which was a stringed instrument that resembled a small harp. It was easy to carry it with him as he tended the sheep. Possibly, he plucked the strings and sang softly as the sheep settled down for the night. It's possible to worship alone when you are not near where you gather with others for a public service of worship. Ask yourself these questions: Why do I attend a church worship service?

Do I attend just because I'm a church member? What are some ways I can use my talents to praise and worship the Lord? Praise is a word that describes how believers relate to God. We value God's worth, and tell Him how much we love and appreciate Him. Our praise and words may easily lead us to remember a song or chorus and change our whole day!

Recognize the Eternal Realities of Worship Psalm 92:5-9

Psalm 92 is referred to us as, "A Song for the Sabbath". But, the content sounds like a personal prayer to the Lord. Unbelievers don't understand our joyful celebration during a worship service. And, Christians who haven't maintained a close relationship with God may merely be attending worship without realizing the joy of praise to our Heavenly Father. Though sinful people seem to represent the majority, they will be destroyed. (vv. 6-9) My prayer: Dear Lord, help me to never forget the wonderful things you've done for me and

our family. I really mean it when I sing the chorus, "I worship you, I worship you, The reason I live...is to worship you".

Enjoy the Benefits of Worship Psalm 92:10-15

The righteous, faithful believers enjoy God's goodness. He presents us with blessings (like the anointing of oil), and strengthens our testimony, (like the force of the wild ox. v. 10 NIV) All the sermons we've heard, the Sunday School lessons we've studied, and the Scriptures we've memorized are the result of our faithfulness in serving the Lord. As we grow older, we will be able to serve Him continually. I grew up in Oakland Park, Florida, where palm trees of all varieties grew plentifully. During hurricanes, I've seen them sway gracefully, but they were strong and survived their enemy...the wind. I want to always be like those palm trees: strong, as I faithfully praise and celebrate the Lord forever.

Davis is a member of Fellowship Church, Meridian.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

An Unexpected Messiah: Honor Him

Luke 4:16-30

By Kelly Mitchell

We live in a time when it is more important than ever before to be confident in our faith and to be able to rationally discuss our beliefs. This is the information age. We are blasted daily with counterpoints to Christianity in the media, in entertainment and in our culture. Unfortunately, this challenge to Christ's sovereignty also exists inside our churches but is much more subtle. How do we defend our churches? How do we protect our families? In this week's lesson, it turns out, the answer begins with you as an able defender.

How? First, Recognize Christ and His Mission (Luke 4:16-21). In Luke's account, this event immediately follows the

temptation in the wilderness. If this is the first time Jesus has come to His home temple since beginning His ministry, their confusion is understandable. Remember, Jesus is about 30 when He begins His ministry (Luke 3:23). He has been attending this temple his entire life. The fact that He is given a scroll to read indicates that He enjoys status in this temple. They know Him but they have only heard rumors of this new side of Him. (Luke 4:23) This is a shocking development for everyone, even His cousin John the Baptist (John 1:29-30). It is understandable that they are unsettled by this new attitude. We are all perplexed at first but we do not have to stay that way.



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better. He will drive us down deeper and deeper until we either wholly submit or wholly reject. He knows that, unless we submit now, we will look back later and curse Him that He did not force us. Ultimately, He accepts our choice but not without a considerable fight. I believe that the average believer sees their Faith as a burden and struggle rather than a source of freedom and blessing. If that is you, its probably because you are stalled here and have not yet moved on to step 3.

Recognize Christ's Concern (Luke 4:25-27). It is amazing to stop and consider how much in

life we blame on God instead of accepting our own contribution. Our God is all powerful so He must really hate us to allow disasters, wars, and illness? This perspective contradicts the very nature of Christ. In God's plan, these are opportunities from Him to show His great love and grace. They are only bad things if we respond with sin rather than obedience and trust. Who do you like to hear testimony from? Someone that has never had anything but good happen in their life or someone that has gone through a disaster and grown closer to God as a result?

React Positively (Luke 4:28-30). This is where we separate the faithful from the fearful. Without a sound understanding of the love of Christ, a positive reaction just is not possible. Churches and Sunday School classes are meant to be safe places to escape from the fear and negativity of the world yet, far too often, they are worse rather than better. Why? It seems less painful to justify our actions than to acknowledge

and face the truth. It was easier to push Jesus over the cliff than to admit He was right and to change a lifetime of habit and ritual. Again, these were people He grew up with. He was known and respected up until this point. Jesus is probably known and respected in your church but are we also adjusting to Him? Until we have, we remain a burden on our churches rather than a blessing. If all our resources are spent maintaining the membership, there is nothing left to make new disciples.

Thoughts for discussion: 1. Does your class offer relief to someone that is suffering or increase their burden by demanding more than it offers? 2. Is your church a safe place to escape the anger, conflict, and dangers of the world? 3. Where are people to go in your community to find God when they cannot find Him on their own?

Mitchell is pastor of Main Street Church, Goodman.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

THE BAPTIST Record

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if

submitted as a JPEG file via either e-mail, CD or DVD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items are generally not publishable. Photographs can not be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

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Volunteers bring relief, hope for future

Southern Baptists continue taking servant hearts to aid hurting Japan

TOHOKU, Japan (BP) — When Nobuko Tanno closes her eyes, she sees tsunami waves rushing in and destroying her village along Japan's northeastern coastline. She sees cars floating and houses coming off foundations. She hears the roar of the water and desperate cries for help.

Her normally stoic face contorts a little with the flood of memories and she quickly opens her eyes. Remembering that fateful day one year ago is still hard. She fixes her gaze on the odd-shaped frame on the white wall in her refurbished home. It immediately brings a smile and a contented sigh escapes.

The framed object is not a peaceful painting, but a section of drywall where Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams signed their names and wrote Bible verses as words of encouragement. For Tanno, however, it's a priceless masterpiece, a reminder that there is hope for the future.

"After the tsunami, my husband and I tried to clean up. By ourselves, we couldn't do much. It was overwhelming," Tanno recounts. The entire first floor was damaged and piled high with debris lodged in toxic mud.

"Then, the yellow shirts [Southern Baptist workers] came to my door. They treated my house like it was their own.

"Their attitude was 'thank you for letting us serve you.' I was really surprised at their servant heart," Tanno says of the five different teams from California, Washington, Oregon, Missouri, and Canada

who worked on her home throughout the year.

"Thank you. Thank you for what you did for my family."

Tanno points to a verse, Jeremiah 33, on the wall. "That is my favorite. It was the first one," she says. "I don't understand all of it but I am learning."

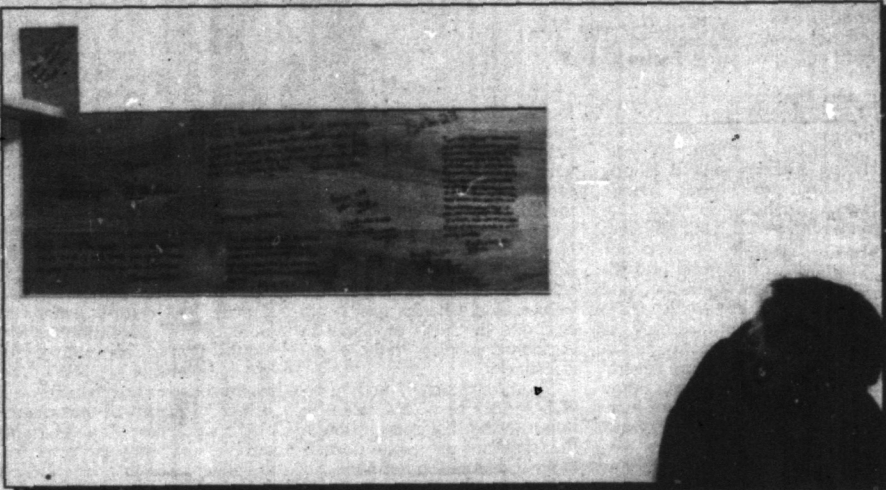
Mickie Lee from Clovis Hills Community Church, Fresno, Ca., smiles when her friend mentions Scripture. Lee, who came with two different disaster relief teams and stayed on to serve as an interpreter, remembers when Tanno was skeptical. Lee says Tanno is not yet a believer but is studying the Bible a team gave her, starting with the verses on her wall so she can understand what makes these "yellow shirts" so different from other volunteers.

Southern Baptist teams, known in this part of Japan by their yellow attire, responded to the world's first triple disaster — a 9.0-magnitude earthquake, a tsunami, and a nuclear crisis — within days. They have kept a steady presence ever since by working through the Tohoku Care ministry of the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention, headquartered in Richmond, Va.

Teams from 15 states have done everything from mudding out houses and rebuilding to hearing survivor stories and hosting banana split parties.

Others have made their impact from afar. A group of Girls in Action from Georgia made rag dolls so teams could hand out toys to children who lost all of their belongings. Women in Louisiana made 4,000 Christmas stockings for IMB missionaries and Southern Baptist disaster relief teams from the States to hand out to the tsunami survivors as a way to share the Christmas story.

Survivor Ryouichi Usuzawa says the Tohoku Care volunteers are different in that they meet more than just physical



FOR ALL TO SEE — Nobuko Tanno looks at Bible verses written on the wall of her home in Ishinomaki, Japan, by Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams from five states who worked to repair her home after last year's devastating tsunami. The homeowner says the verses were so encouraging that she couldn't cover it up with paint, so she framed it for all to see. She has a Japanese Bible, given to her by a team, with all of the verses from the wall marked and is learning the significance behind each verse. (BP photo)

needs, but also emotional and spiritual needs. They often do this simply by listening to survivors like Usuzawa recount their harrowing escape from death, or by playing games to help them forget the nightmares.

Like more than 323,000 other Japanese, Usuzawa was forced to move to temporary housing when her home was destroyed last March. Any flat piece of land was used to set up the prefabricated houses. Many villages and families were split up, forcing most survivors to deal with grief and depression on their own.

Usuzawa's new community is among the largest, with 2,164 households.

"After we all moved to temporary housing, we just stared at the floor. We had so much grief. It was such a pathetic situation that my heart broke.

Then, the volunteers came and listened," Usuzawa says.

He looks back at a new green building and adds, "The reason this community building was set up was so people could come together and share their suffering — encourage one another."

Through the Japan Disaster Response fund, Southern Baptists provided three community buildings in different locations along the coast. Arkansas Baptists paid for decks to go up around the buildings, providing more gathering space for outreach events, and a team from Tennessee did the construction work.

Usuzawa says the buildings provide a place for the next phase of Japan's healing, "heart care," to begin. "I see this building every day and it's a signal to me that Southern Baptists in America are telling us to 'hang

in there' ... that they care about us," she says.

IMB emeritus missionaries Gerald and Brenda Burch stress that the willingness of Southern Baptists to unselfishly give their money, time, and prayers have survivors and fellow Japanese volunteers taking notice.

Missionaries say Tohoku in northeast Japan has been closed to the Gospel for hundreds of years. Less than one percent claim to be evangelical Christians in the areas hardest hit by the tsunami.

"The steady flow of Southern Baptists since the tsunami has opened doors," Gerald says. "Before, it was hard to talk to anyone. Now when they open the doors of their small temporary houses and see our faces and yellow vests, the countenance on their faces changes. They are glad to see us. They invite us in for tea."

Same sex parenting studies' content, conclusions questioned

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (BP) — Over the last few years, a few published studies have claimed that children raised by same-sex couples compare favorably to, and sometimes even better than, children raised by moms and dads on measures of self-esteem and academics — but a closer look at the research shows there are quite a few problems associated with those studies both in the way they were conducted and in what they reveal, says Glenn T. Stanton, Focus on the Family's director of family formation studies.

According to a study published late last year in the *Archive of Sexual Behavior*, girls raised by lesbian mothers are seven times more likely to consider a same-sex encounter, and twice as likely to identify as lesbian or bisexual than those raised by heterosexual parents. They are also seven times more likely to

use the "morning after" pill after unprotected sex to start an abortion by preventing a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus and growing into a full-term baby.

"We already know that girls who grow up without fathers are more likely to be sexually adventurous, and it has a lot to do with being fatherless," Stanton explained. "Two lesbians can be the most loving moms in the world, but they can't give a girl the kind of positive attention and other-gendered affirmation she needs from a dad."

While girls raised by lesbians tend to be much more sexually experimental than their peers, boys tend to be more sexually reticent, Stanton said.

"Boys without male role models tend to be either overly super-macho, trying to see how many girls they can get, or wallflowers," Stanton said.

"They're not necessarily more sexually virtuous than boys raised by heterosexual parents, but they haven't developed emotionally and psychologically in the same ways.

"It's not that they don't want to go in the water — they're not inclined to go anywhere near the water."

Overall, the research shows that 64% of children raised in lesbian households consider having homosexual relationships, compared to 17% raised by heterosexual parents.

The data was drawn from the U.S. National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study, the longest, largest study of same-sex families conducted so far. Articles based on it have been published in several academic journals.

The 84 lesbian families, a statistically insignificant sample size, were recruited exclusively from San

Francisco, Boston, and Washington, D.C. All were seeking pregnancy (or were already pregnant) through artificial insemination, and learned about the study from announcements at lesbian-oriented events, from newspapers, and in bookstores. Thirty-eight percent belonged to gay activist organizations.

"These women know they're participating in something that's really important for their movement," Stanton said, pointing out the study's 97% retention rate as extremely rare in scientific circles.

"Joe Sixpack could discern the problems with this study, but good journalists tend to put their critical thinking skills to bed on this issue because they don't want the backlash that will come down on them if they ask critical questions," Stanton observed.